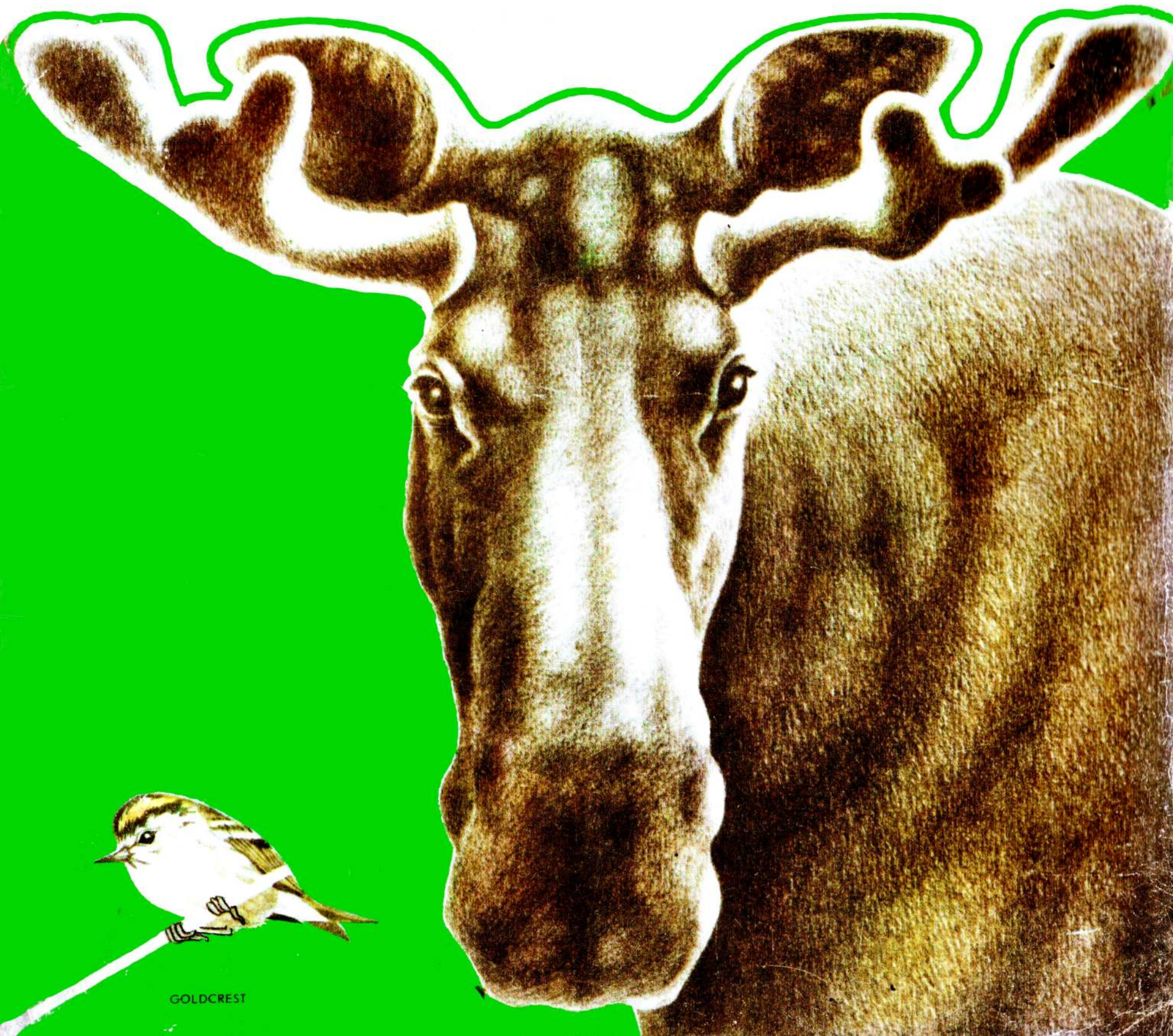
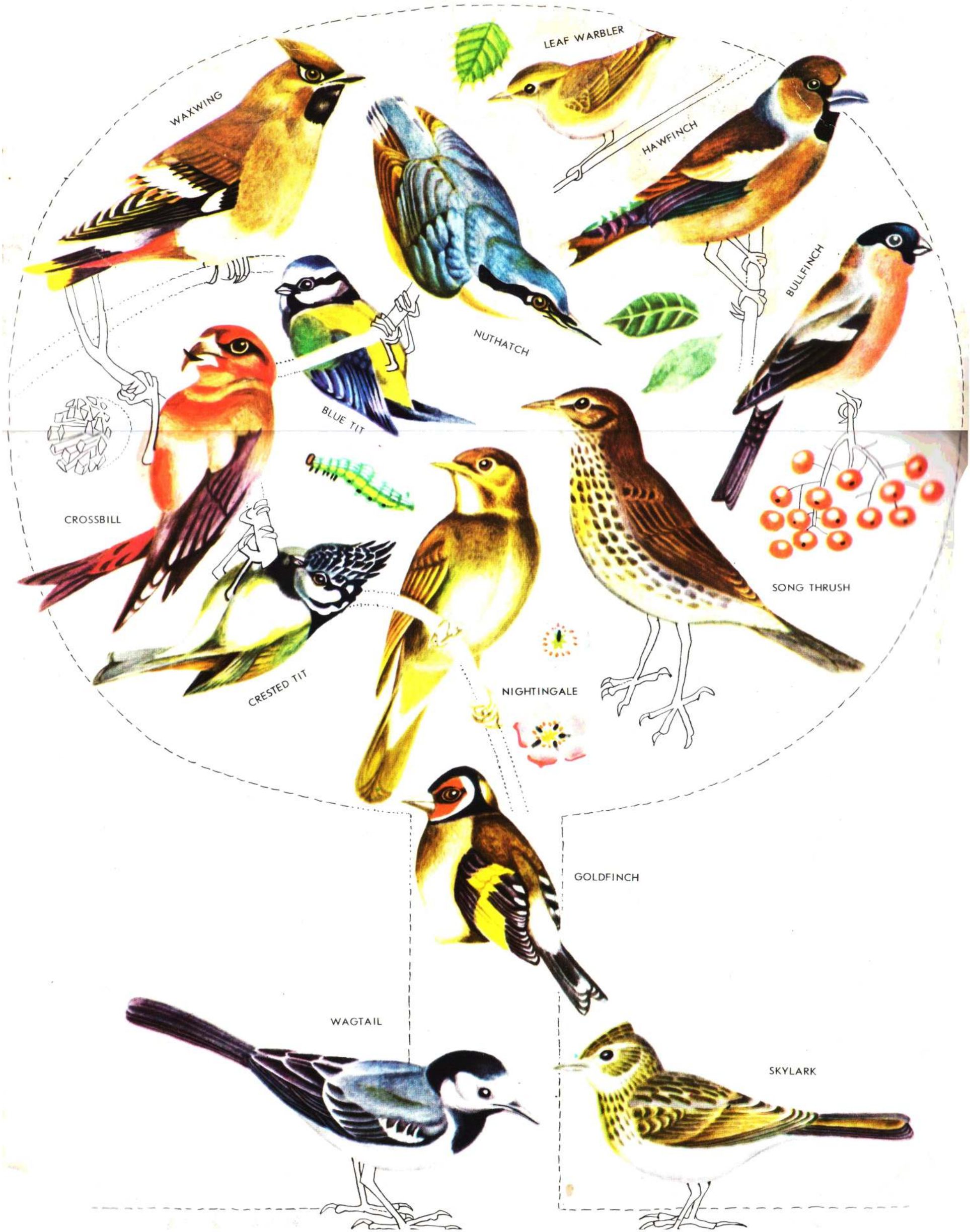
# ESTONIAN BIRDS AND ANIMALS




WAXWING
LEAF WARBLER
HAWFINCH
NUTHATCH
BULLFINCH
BLUE TIT
CROSSBILL
SONG THRUSH
CRESTED TIT
NIGHTINGALE
GOLDFINCH
WAGTAIL
SKYLARK

# ESTONIAN BIRDS AND ANIMALS

BY
FRED JÜSSI

ILLUSTRATED BY
HERALD EELMA

TALLINN • PERIOODIKA 1981

Has it ever occurred to you that the world does not belong to you only and those near and dear to you? Maybe the tit behind your window and the hedgehog in your orchard are just as much your neighbours as the girl practising the piano upstairs or the father next-door, who starts his motor-cycle every morning to drive to work?

In the world there are many famous people who are always in the news and everybody has something to say about them. But there are many more of those whom really nobody knows although they are people just the same. That's the way things are in the woods, too: when the powerful elk runs through the thicket, branches break and the thudding of his hoofs can be heard far away; everybody knows the elk. But the tiny goldcrest in the top of a spruce-tree, who also has a heart beating inside it and a life of its own to live, doesn't even stir the air with its teeny wings and nothing is even spoken about it.

You will find both the mighty elk and the tiny goldcrest (so tiny it could find shelter in the elk's nostril) on the cover of this book. Here, in this book, you will also find many other birds and animals. They are your neighbours—some close and well-known, others far away and strange; some, perhaps, quite unknown to you. They breathe the same air you do, they are fed by the soil or the sea that belong to you and those close to you. The same sun you see shining is also shining upon them. Of course, the artist could not draw all the animals and birds of Estonia in this book. There just wouldn't have been room for them all.

Drawing birds and animals is an interesting pastime. Try to draw a bird or an animal you like most in this book, or some other one you know but can't find in here, and you'll see it isn't quite as easy as drawing a car or an airplane.

Our country is rich in rustling forests, marshes and bogs, wide fields, rivers and lakes. In the north and west the Estonian coast is washed by the waves of the Baltic Sea. Lake Peipsi stretches in the east. There's quite a lot of everything for such a small country. In spring our woods resound with birdsong and you can hear the cries of the cranes and the cooing of the black grouse in the swamps; the air above the fields is a-singing and innumerable gulls screech by the water; and in winter the blanket of snow covering the ground is studded with footprints of animals.

Although birds and animals, especially the birds, move about quite a lot, each of them still has a favourite nesting place of its own. Some live in remote corners of the woods, others in gardens and parks where we can often see them. There are also those who make their home by the sea.

But now let's pack a lunch-bag, pull on our boots and step outside. Let's go and find out who we'll meet today. The lunch-bag had better be a big one and the boots strong: the walk will be a long one. Let's go quietly, leaving whistling and shouting behind. Animals are scared of loud noises and they would hide themselves and birds would fly away. Once in a while we'll stop and I'll tell you about the birds and animals we meet on our walk with the help of the artist.

Let's pretend it's an early spring morning and everybody else is still fast asleep. We'll take a box of matches and a lantern along because we also want to spend a night in the woods. Then we can kindle a fire to give us warmth and comfort. I know a boat and oars hidden somewhere, so we can row across a river or a lake. Let's pretend we're in a make-believe world, because it really is a bit like it. Only remember to be very quiet!

See, there's a swallow in the yard, perching on a telephone wire and looking around. Another one is singing on the open door of the cowshed. They probably plan to build a nest in the cowshed. Swallows build their nests of clay and straw, and line them with feathers and tufts of wool for warmth. Everyone knows the twittering of the swallow. The swallow is the favourite bird with us. That is why the International Council for Bird Protection endorsed the swallow as the national bird of Estonia according to the wish of our ornithologists.

In spring the swallows move around in pairs, but in autumn when they are getting ready to fly to the south, they gather in large flocks and then the telephone wires of villages are dotted with them like staves with notes. The swallow returns to us when the weather gets warm again. We say: the swallow brings us warm sunny days.

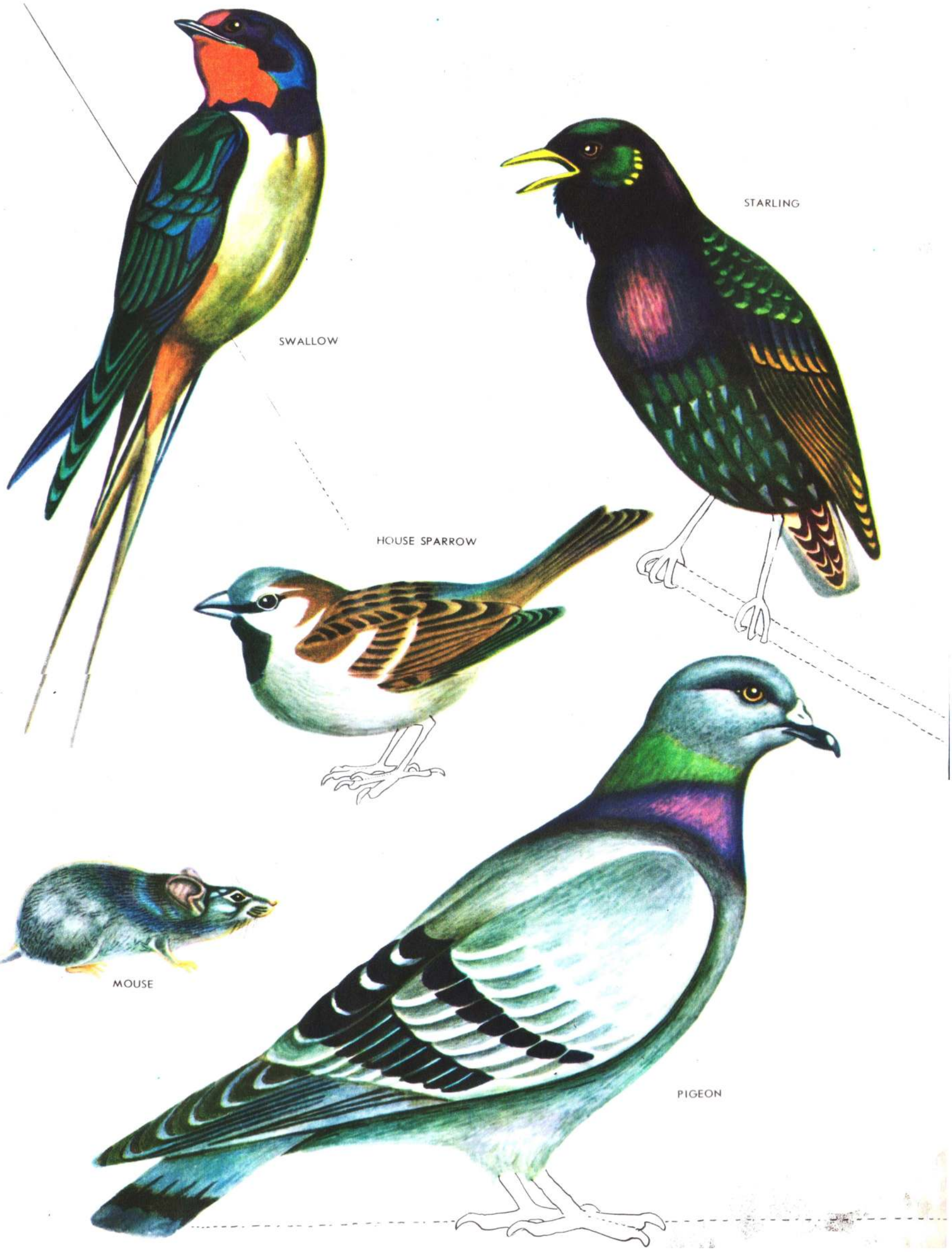
The swallow has a song of its own, but the starling in front of its nesting box sings songs that are borrowed from others: a bit from the swallow, a little from the curlew and snatches from the blackbird and the golden oriole. It can also cackle like a hen and creak like a gate. Not all birds can learn all that, but a starling can. And with chatter like that the starling heralds the spring in March. The starling arrives in spring, his coat of feathers glittering and his bill a bright yellow. By autumn it changes into a dotted feather coat and its bill turns quite black.

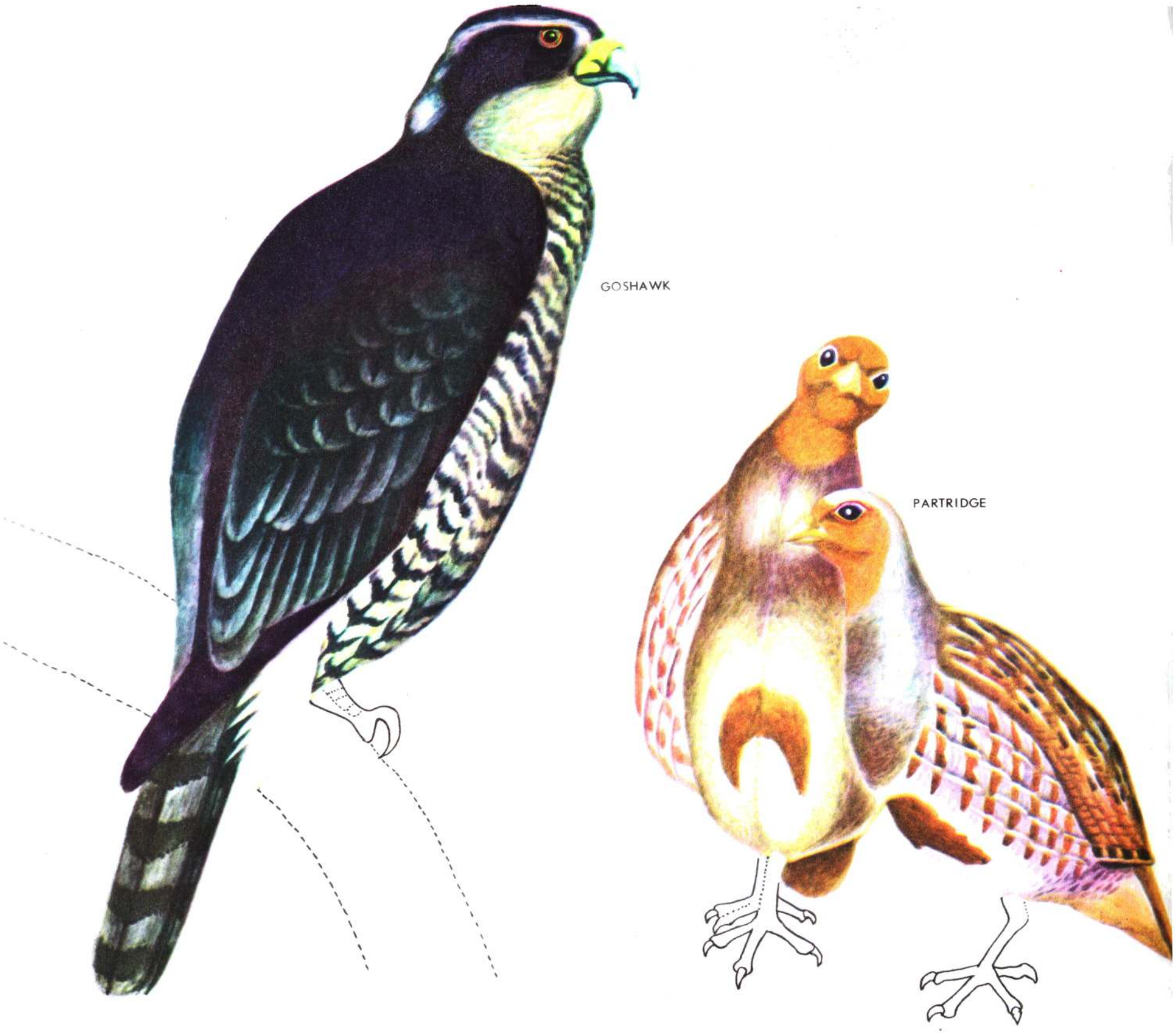
Sparrows won't retreat from the dog's bowl even when the owner, clinking his chain, comes out of his kennel. But try to clap your hands and you'll see the greycoats take off with a whirr for the lilac-bush. They feel safe there. But if somebody pauses near the bush, their chirping stops immediately.

Something grey flashes behind the dog's kennel. It's a little mouse who's been staying up late on its nightly mouse business. Luckily for the little mouse the cat happens to be asleep, and those wild animals and birds who prey upon the mice won't come near the house. The crow or the magpie won't bother to come here because of a single mouse. The only time they lurk around the farmyard is when hens have young chicks.

You can see the forest in the distance. We get there straight across the meadow, no need to follow the road.

Strange things are afloat today: the air is singing. Have you ever noticed that in spring and summer the air sings above fields? Actually it's the skylarks who do the singing, but they are so high up you have to scan the sky for a long time before you spot one. And if you don't, it really seems as if the air were singing. But when the skylark drops from the height like a stone, spreading its wings just before touching the ground, and sets itself upon a tussock you'd be surprised to find it a very modest bird. You find the skylark on the inside front cover of this book beside the wagtail, just as they often are neighbours in the fields and meadows.


SWALLOW
STARLING
HOUSE SPARROW
MOUSE
PIGEON




These two looking at us, one of them with a horseshoe-shaped dark brown patch on its breast, are partridges. In winter a whole covey of them lived in the field, but the goshawk found them one by one and only a few survived. In the spring the rest flew off but these two remained. By next winter there'll again be a flock of them because a partridge lays more than twenty eggs and the family grows quickly. The goshawk also likes to chase hares in the field but usually hunts in the woods because that is where the hare lives. In summer the hare has a grey coat but in winter its coat is snowy white.

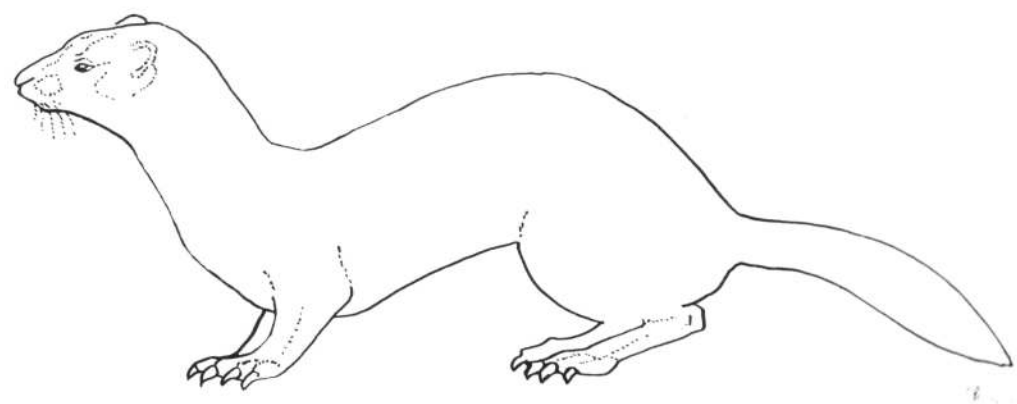
The hare has nimble legs; there it goes leaping across the plain. Now and then it stops to listen. When the hare squats, its ears are down but any suspicious sound makes its ears stand upright. It probably has its young hidden somewhere in the grass so that the polecat wouldn't find them: if it does, it'll kill them. The hare has many enemies. The polecat isn't afraid of anyone, its unpleasant smell frightens everyone away, only the hawk or the eagle don't seem to mind the smell.

Nobody can catch the tiny weasel by the ditch: there is no other animal as agile as the weasel. It is difficult to notice the weasel in winter because then its coat becomes as white as the snow.

Some crows are flying across the field. They are not the common grey ones who flock together near the cow-

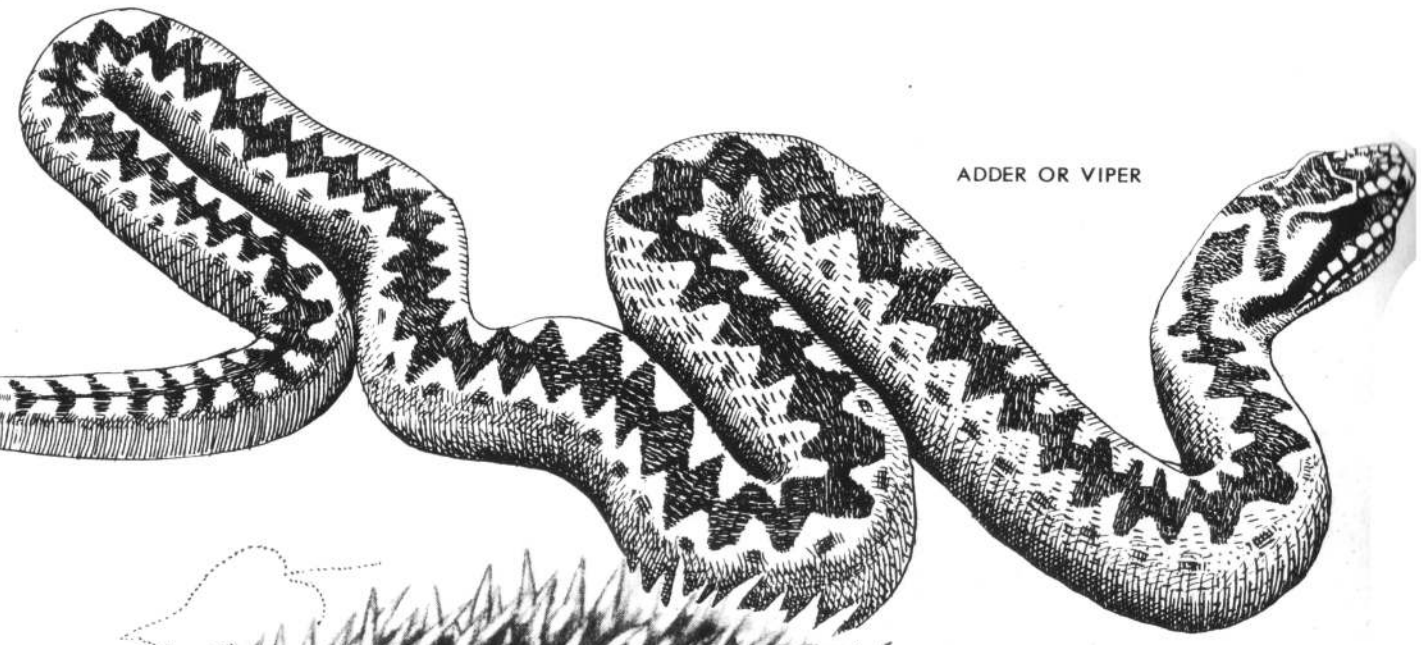
POLECAT

HARE



WEASEL

ROOK



ADDER OR VIPER

HEDGEHOG

houses in wintertime. They are black. Black crows are called rooks and they spend the winter months in the south, returning again in spring together with the starlings. Now they keep flying to and fro between the park and the plough. They have their nests in the park, a whole village of nests. In every crown of a tree there are six or seven nests, and sometimes even more. They fly to the plough to find food. The rook is a bird of the plough: wherever there's a tractor ploughing a field you'll be sure to see some rooks on the furrows looking for worms. The rook also likes the city and that's why some people call it the city crow.

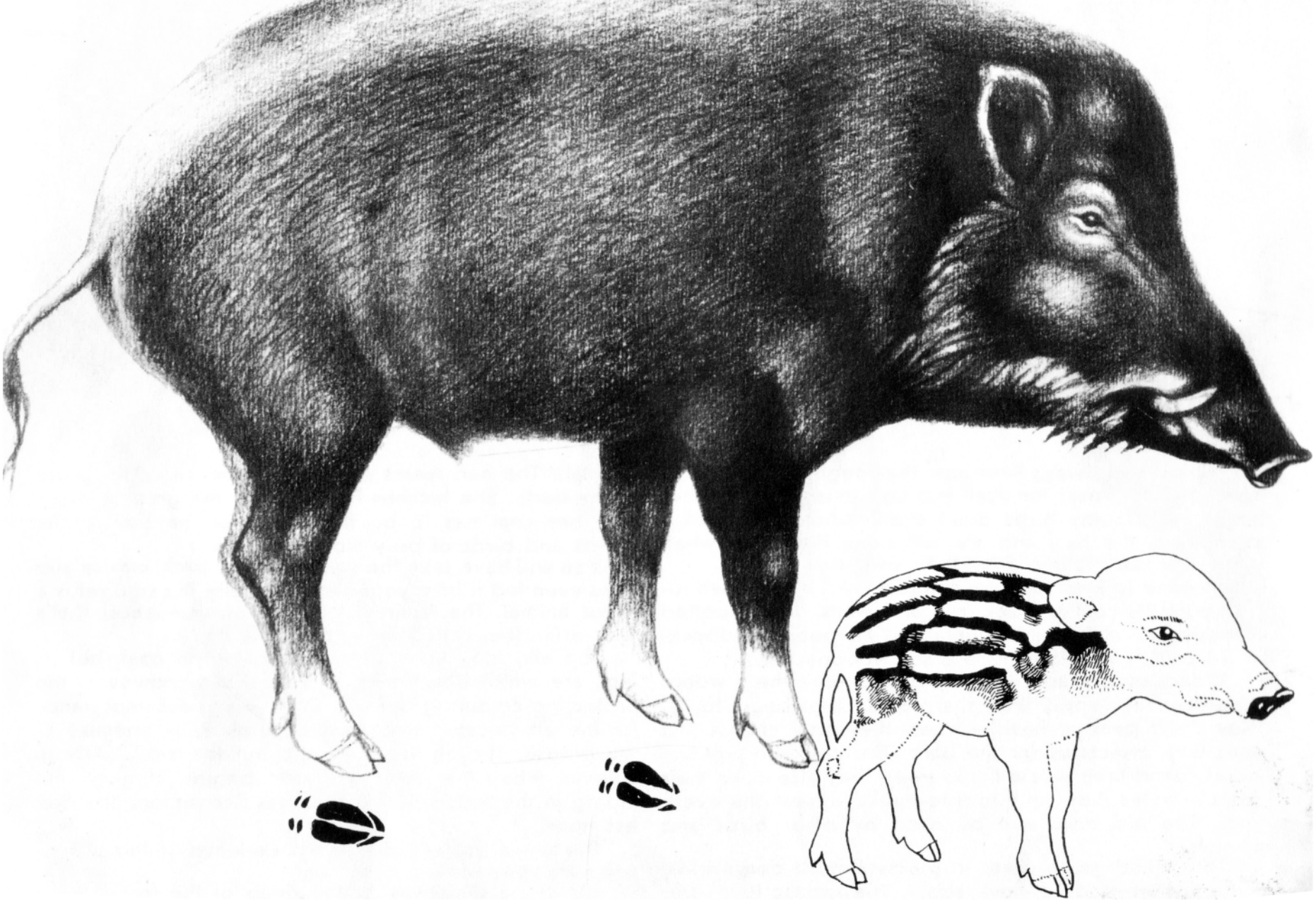
At the edge of the woods we must look out for the viper. It might be curled up in the grass. A viper bite hurts a lot because it is poisonous. The viper's teeth will not get through a sturdy boot but if you walk barefoot, be very careful. There's no cause to fear the viper: if you give it time. it'll go its own way peacefully.

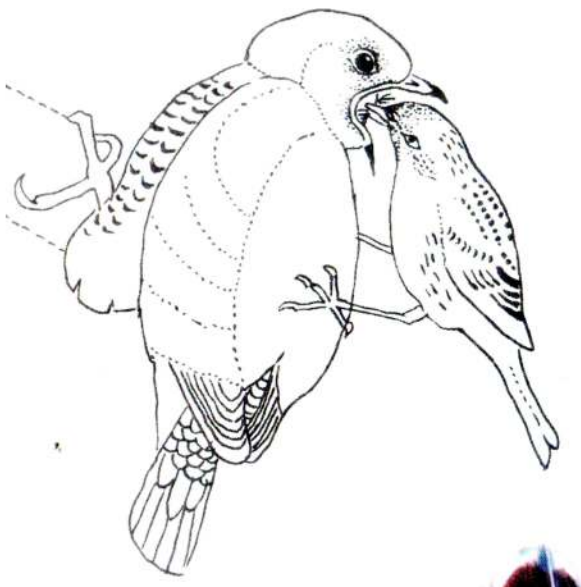
The hedgehog is not afraid of the viper because it has sharp spines to protect it from its enemies. If anything threatens the hedgehog it rolls itself up into a ball so that even the tip of its nose can't be seen.

The viper and the hedgehog hibernate. They meet seldom because the viper crawls about during the day while the hedgehog scurries around in the dusk.

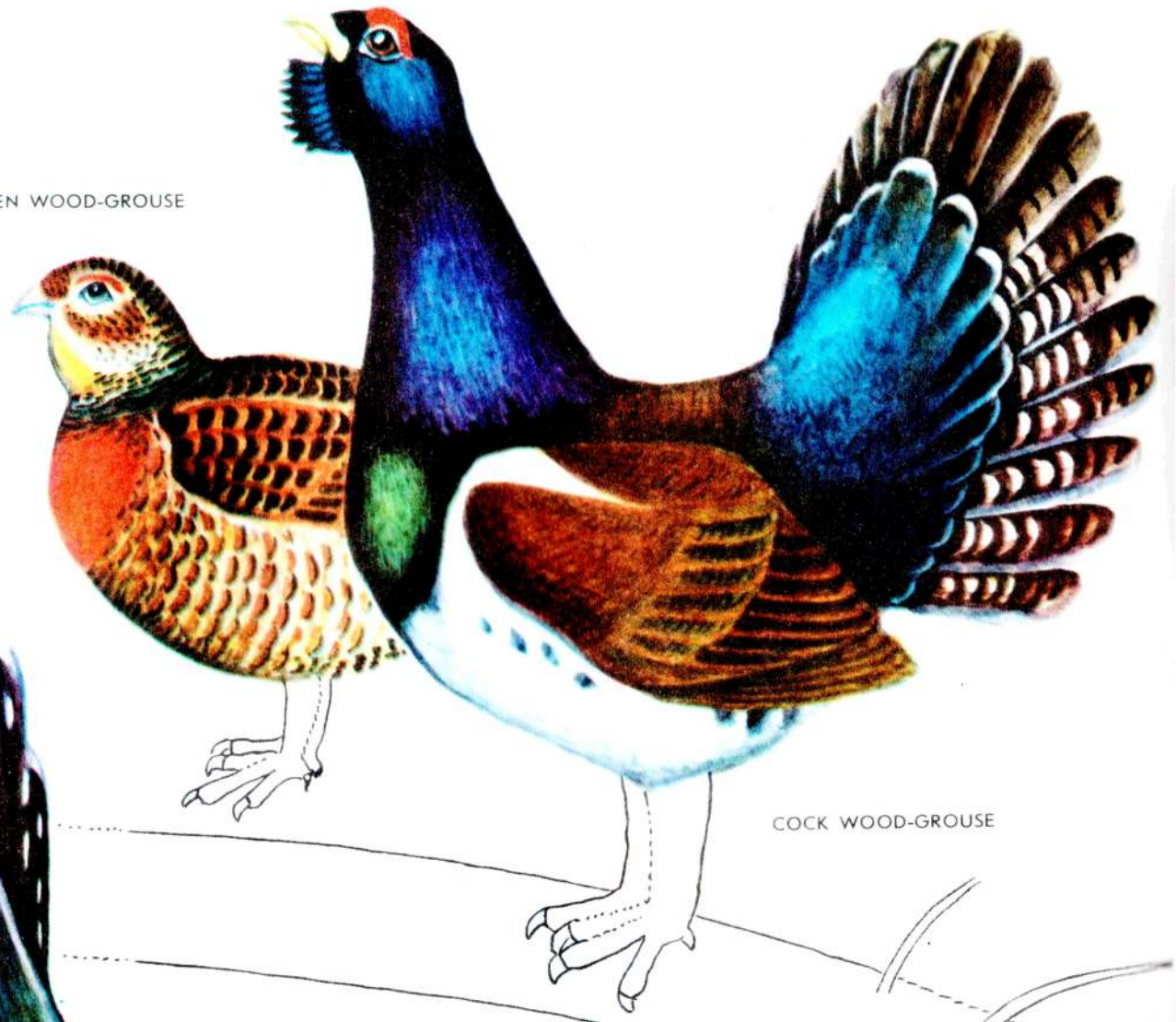
Birds are singing in the forest. There is the chaffinch (on the front cover of the book), the whistling song thrush and the leaf warbler who makes a warbling sound. You can see several woodland birds on the inside front cover in the crown of a tree. All of them nest in our country, except the waxwing whose home is in Lapland.

The ground under the trees has been rooted. Who could have done it? Probably the wild boar. Wild boars always herd together, they never move about alone. The sows have small striped piglets — they were born in April. They're born striped because then no one will notice them in the grass. When they grow bigger the stripes fade.





HEN WOOD-GROUSE



COCK WOOD-GROUSE

CUCKOO

The cuckoo always lives near the songbirds because it never builds a nest for itself but lays its eggs into other birds' nests. Some birds don't even notice they have a stranger in the nest and are still none the wiser when feeding a foster-baby twice their own size.

Someone is knocking on a tree-trunk. It's the woodpecker. If its coat is black, red and white, it's a spotted woodpecker. If its coat is greenish, it's a green woodpecker, and if it's jet-black it's a black woodpecker.

Woodpeckers are the carpenters of the wood. Wherever they apply their sharp bills, chips begin to fly. They don't peck at healthy trees, they only choose the ones with insects under the bark. The carpenters of the wood spend their whole life in trees, they also make their nests in holes they cut into tree-trunks, a new one every year. The old ones will be used by other birds and animals.

The wood-grouse lives in pinewoods. It doesn't like places where people move about. The grouse loves big woods. It's a beautiful bird, especially the cock with his fine tail. The hen wears a brown-dotted coat the colour of the earth. She hatches her eggs on the ground, that's why her coat has to be the colour of the soil so the beasts and birds of prey won't notice her.

You will have seen the squirrel in the park, maybe you have even fed it from your hand. Actually the squirrel is a forest animal. The squirrel feeds on spruce-seeds, that's why it is often called the king of the cone.

The elk, too, has a dark, bark-coloured coat, but its legs are white like trunks of birch trees. However, the protecting colouring doesn't have very great importance for the elk because it doesn't have as many enemies as the grouse. The elk fears no one but the wolf. Only in autumn, when the hunting season begins, it goes into hiding in the marshes. The buck has fine antlers, the doe has none.

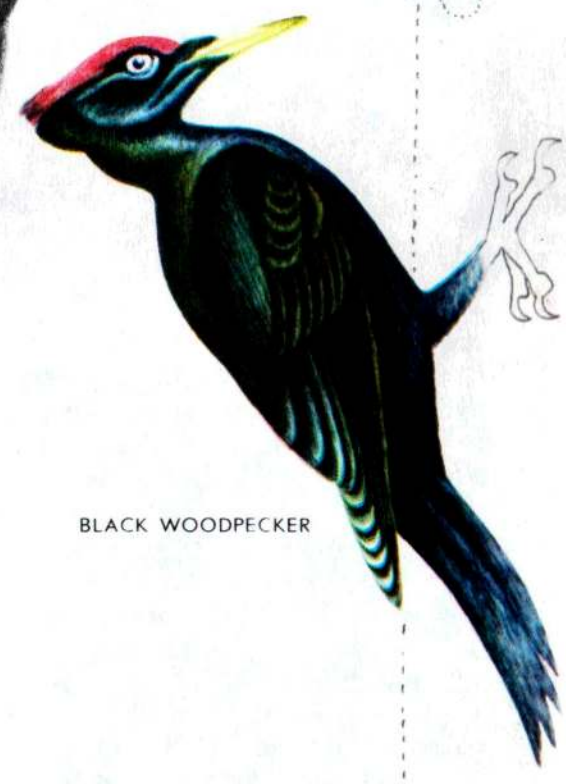
The animal you see munching tree-leaves in this picture is an elk doe.

It's still a long way to the deep of the forest. Let's take a rest and see what the lunch-bag has to offer. Isn't

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER

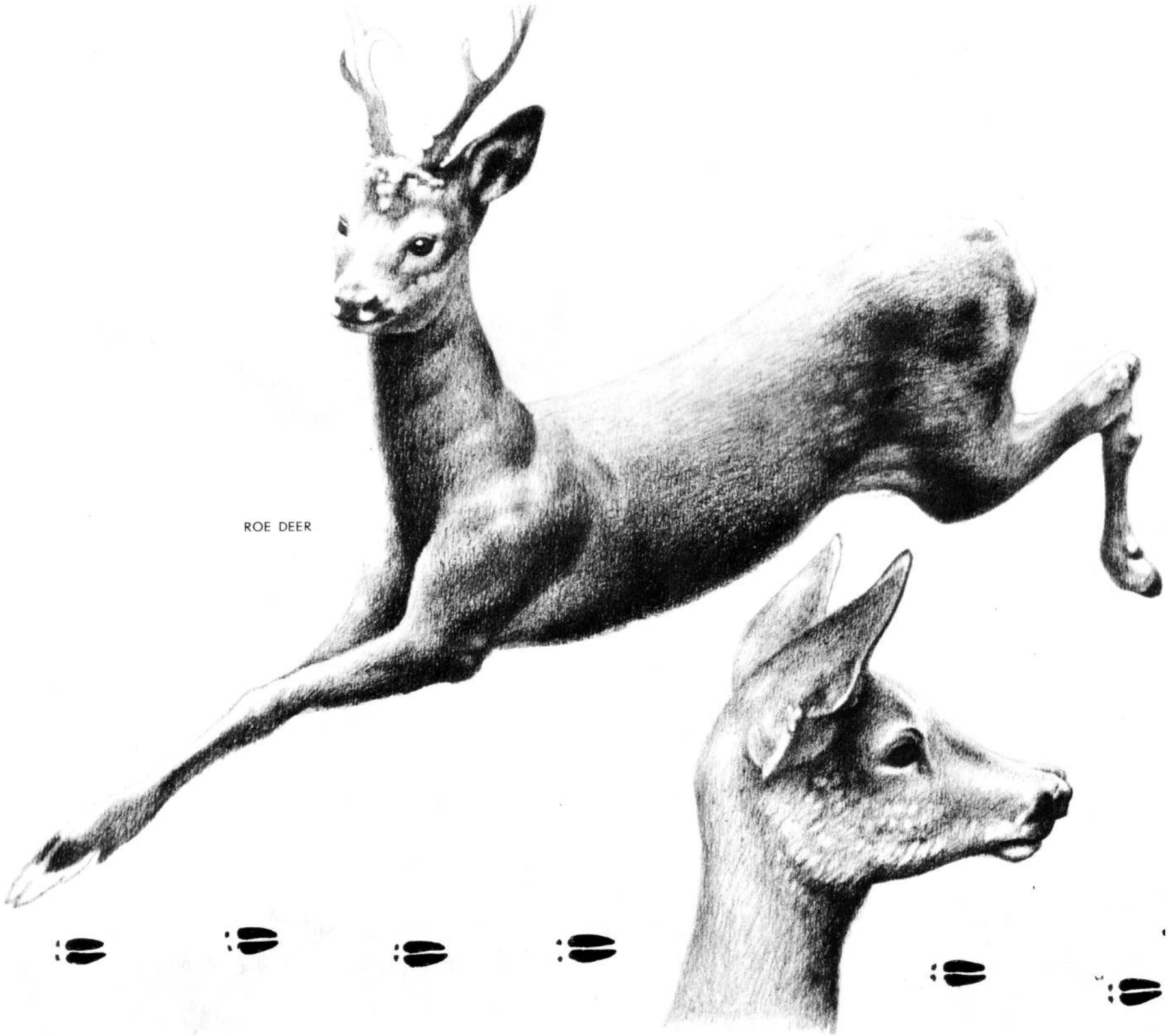
GREEN WOODPECKER

ELK



BLACK WOODPECKER

RED SQUIRREL



ROE DEER

it pleasant to sit under a bush and watch the roe deer come out into the open: very cautiously they take one step at a time, with their ears pricked up. The male, he's called a roebuck, has horns, the doe doesn't. By winter the roebuck as well as the elk buck cast their horns. In spring they will grow new ones again.

The roe deer moves lightly and gracefully. There's no other animal in the European forests as graceful and beautiful as the roe deer. The roe deer likes the open woodlands with rivers and brooks.

The bear makes its home in the heart of the forest. In winter bears hibernate in their dens, sucking their paws. They wake up and come out in spring. The mother bear has her cubs with her. They were born while their mother was hibernating. There's no cause to be afraid of the bear in the forest: bears never attack people if they are left alone. The bear doesn't even approach man in the forest, or if it does, it only sniffs at him and then goes its way.

There's no need to be afraid of the lynx, either. The lynx is a particularly cautious animal: as soon as it sees the man, it hides itself. The lynx needs his sharp claws and teeth and his sharp hearing for catching the black grouse, the hare and the young of the deer.

Even more rare an animal than the bear or the lynx is the flying squirrel. Nowadays we can find a few of them in the forests of Alutaguse only. The flying squirrel is a night-loving creature who spends the day asleep in a tree-hollow, curled up under its bushy tail, and doesn't come out before the evening. The flying squirrel doesn't fly like the birds do, it leaps through the air from tree to tree. The bear and the flying squirrel are rare in Estonia.

Although the day begins early in spring and lasts a long time, there comes the time when it reaches its close. In the evening the songbirds once more burst forth in a chorus but as darkness advances it gradually dies down until the forest is silent. The hour of the nocturnal animals and birds has arrived. The marten goes hunting and the bat takes off to catch insects. Can you hear the owl hoot and the nightjar churr? You must listen attentively because there's little to be seen in the dark.

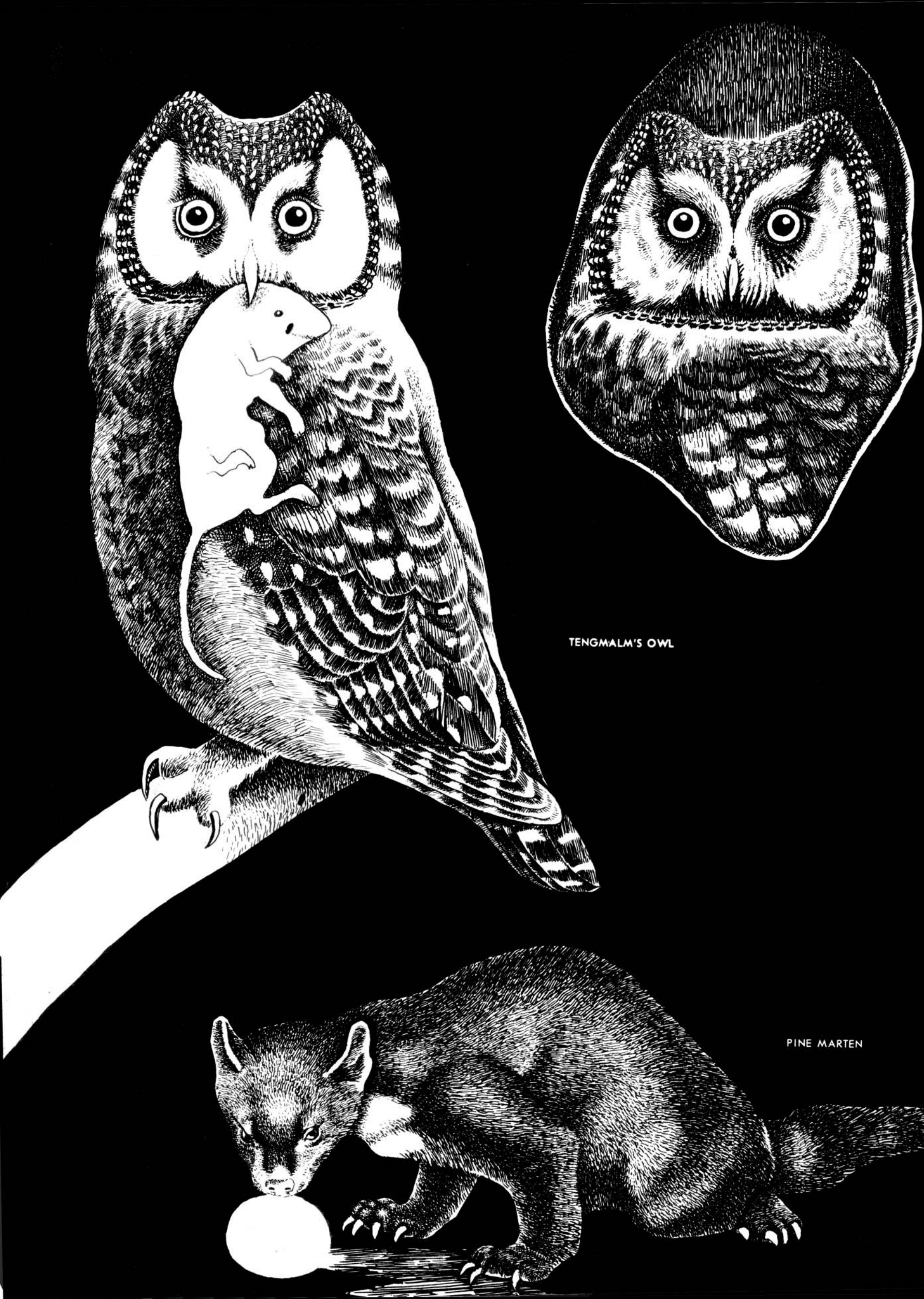
FLYING SQUIRREL

BROWN BEAR

NIGHTJAR

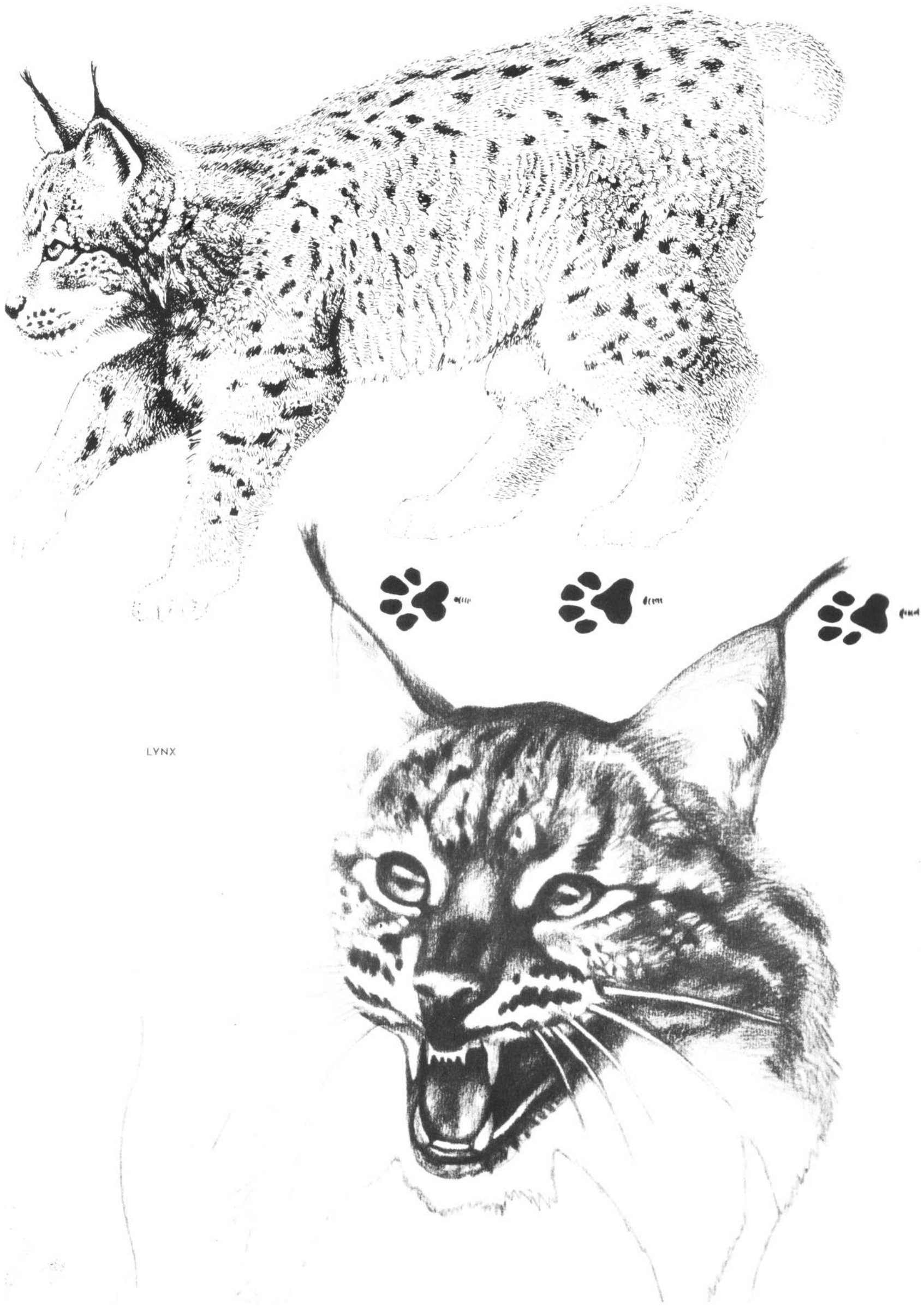
EAGLE OWL

LONG-EARED BAT



TENGMALM'S OWL

PINE MARTEN



LYNX

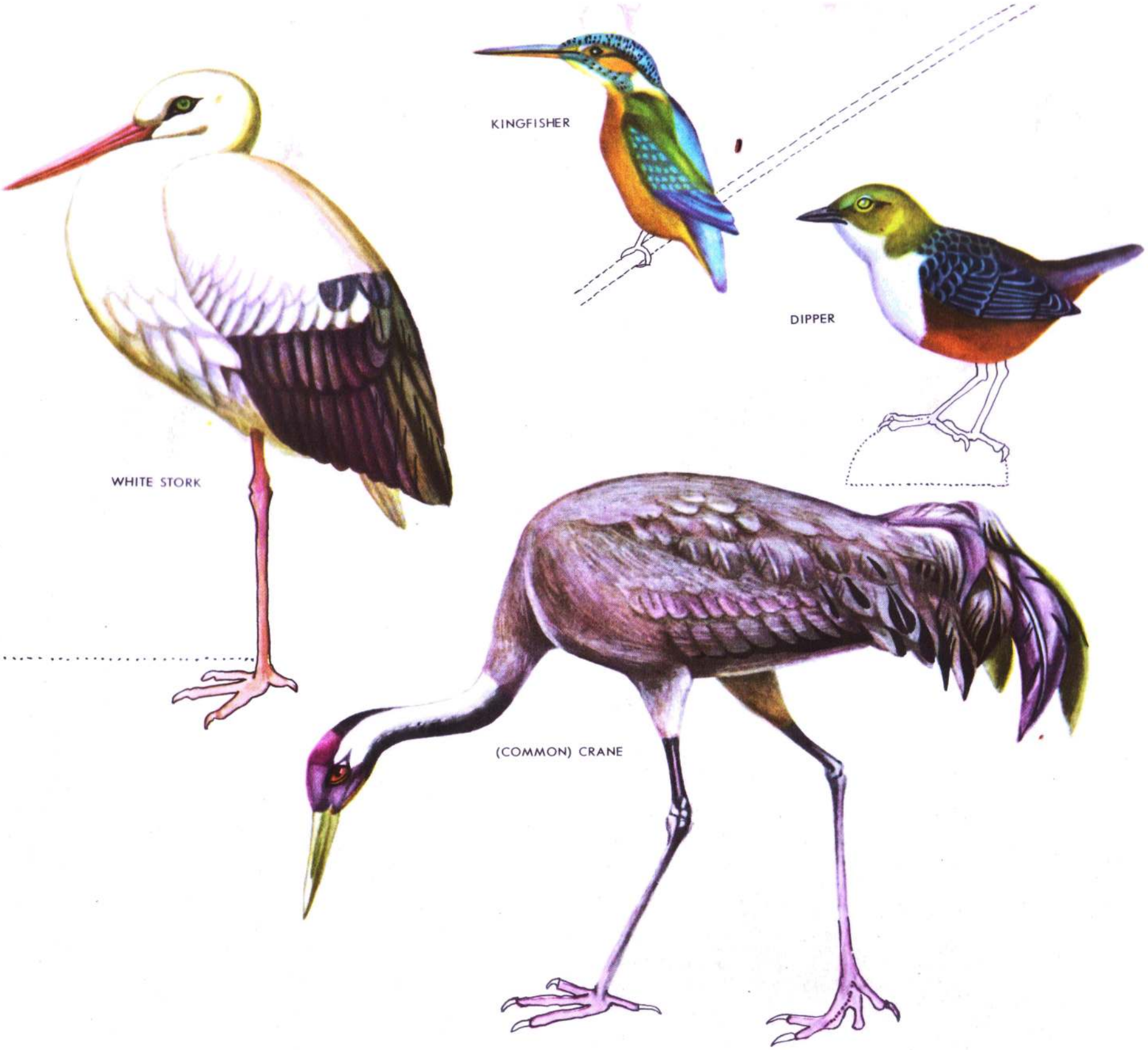
WOLF

BEAVER

MOLE

WATER VOLE

OTTER




birds living in the neighbourhood. Some animals and birds make their homes by the water.

One of them is the otter, a good swimmer and skilful fisher. The other two are the water vole and the beaver. The beaver cuts down big trees with its sharp teeth and builds dams across brooks under the cover of night. You don't find otters and beavers in every river or lake, they make their homes far from towns and villages—away from the neighbourhood of man. They want to be left alone to catch fish and hunt the water vole, chew the bark of trees and dam brooks.

The most beautiful bird of the riverside is the kingfisher. The kingfisher catches fish just like the otter does. Because of its glittering plumage it is also called a flying gem. Few of our birds have such exotic, colourful plumage as the kingfisher, with the exception of the roller and the golden oriole (you'll find them on the front cover). The golden oriole is a woodland bird whose cat-like caterwaul is supposed to forecast rain. The roller can sometimes be seen sitting on telephone wires by the roadside.

In winter, when the rivers in northern regions are frozen over, the dipper comes here and stays by the rapids of our rivers. In spring the dipper flies back to the north. There's no other bird who can run along under the water as the dipper does when it's looking for insects between the stones on the bottom of the rapid.

Marshy meadows on the river banks and lakeshores are the favourite strolling places of the stork and the crane. The white stork comes from the village lane, the crane is a swamp bird. Although they do look a bit alike they're just as little related to each other as the sparrow is to the starling.

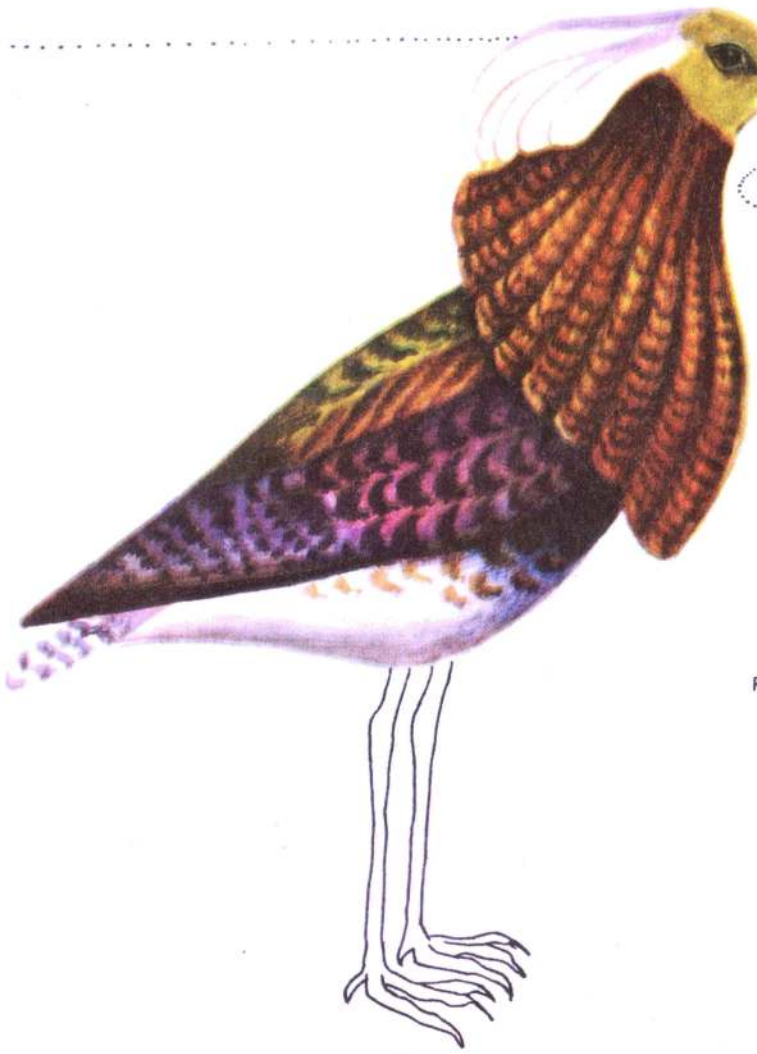
BLACK GROUSE

CURLEW

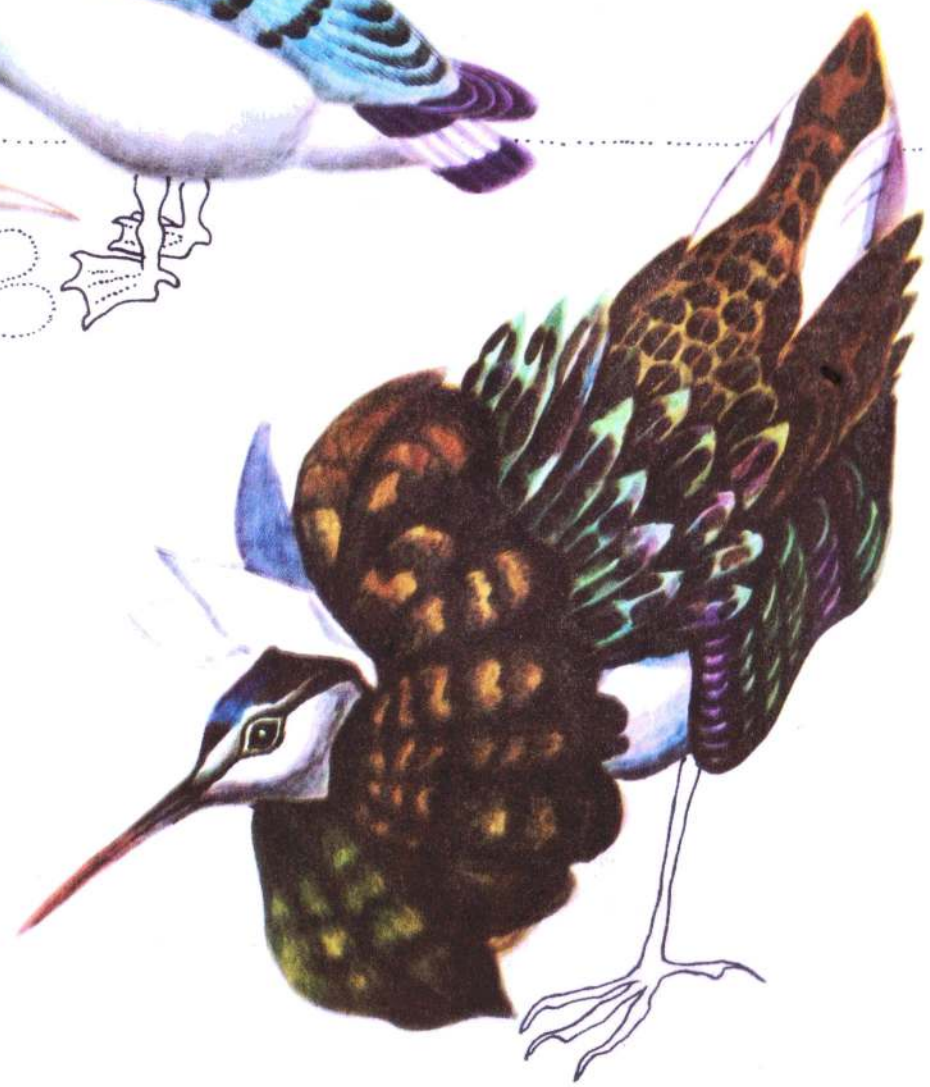
COOT

BLACK-THROATED DIVER

BARNACLE GOOSE



RUFF

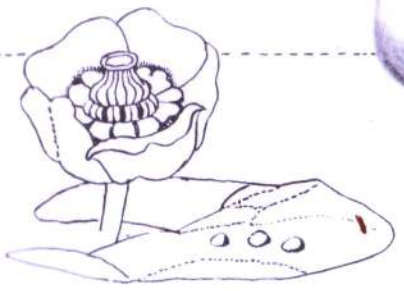


The distant babble sounding from the marsh in the early hours of the morning comes from the play-ground of the black grouse. The blackcocks begin their play when the snow still covers the ground and continue with it throughout the spring. It isn't before the end of May that their cooing falls silent. During their play the blackcocks run around, their wings dangling and their lyre-shaped tails spread. Some jump up on a tussock and hiss so that clouds of steam escape from their bills. But the hens keep aside as if they had nothing to do with it; yet it is for their sake that the blackcocks give such a display. Sometimes the cooing of a blackcock can be heard in the forest in autumn. It is said to forecast a warm winter.

The cooing of the blackcock is one of the first morning sounds in the swamp. It is soon followed by the cries of the black-throated diver and the splashing of the coot on the lake and the trills of the curlew in the marsh. The trill of the curlew is one of the most beautiful spring sounds in the marshes, but it could also be heard in the lowlying fields and meadows. It is in places like these that the ruffs, too, hold the spring games. They have fine plumage and colourful ruffs round their necks. The ruff-cocks are engaged in mute struggle. The looker-on can witness a weird, colourful performance: the birds seem to be quarrelling at one minute, the next they stand peacefully side by side and preen their feathers as if nothing had happened.

In early spring the migrant barnacle goose, sometimes in enormous flocks, also stops on the coastal plains of western Estonia and the islands of Hiiumaa and Saaremaa. A flock of barnacle geese appearing on the horizon looks like a cloud of smoke. Some geese fly straight on, others land cackling to peck at fresh grass. They always take turns: some are pecking and others are keeping watch. Only at the end of May do barnacle geese desert our shores.

MUTE SWAN



EDIBLE FROG

COMMON FROG

Where have you seen the swan? Was it on the pond in a park or on the sea or a lake? In early spring and late autumn the sea and Lake Peipsi are covered with swans. That's the time the swans sing. However, not all swans sing, only whooper swans do. The whooper swan dwells in the tundra. They are heading there in spring and return again in autumn. Those who stay to nest on our lakes and bays are mute swans. They have a large dark bump on their bills. Mute swans also live on ponds. Mute swans don't sing, but in flight their wing feathers swish in the wind which sounds as beautiful as a song.

The greatest number of mute swans build their nests in Käina Bay by the island of Hiiumaa and in the Matsalu Nature Reserve where they hide their large nests in dense reed. In autumn the mute swan flies to the south together with the whooper swan who returns from the north.

Frogs make their home by lakes, ditches and puddles. The common frog can be found all over Estonia, but the green-coloured frog lives in southern Estonia. In spring, at the spawning time, frogs gather in great numbers and croak in chorus, which can be heard far off on a quiet evening. Then people say frogs are giving a concert. Later the young of the frog, called tadpoles, can be seen swimming in some puddles and ditches. Tadpoles are a treat for many a waterbird.

Like the swan, the mallard and the great crested grebe are waterbirds. The goosander is, too. The great crested grebe and the goosander dive and swim well because they are fishers. The bittern fishes too, but its fishing-ground is the reed-bed where the water is shallow and where it's impossible to swim or to dive. Sometimes in the evening a sound like the bellowing of a bull can be heard from the reed-bed. It's the bittern who makes that booming sound.

Other animals, quite tiny, hide themselves in the reeds too. They're harvest mice, expert acrobats on reed stalks and in clumps of grass.

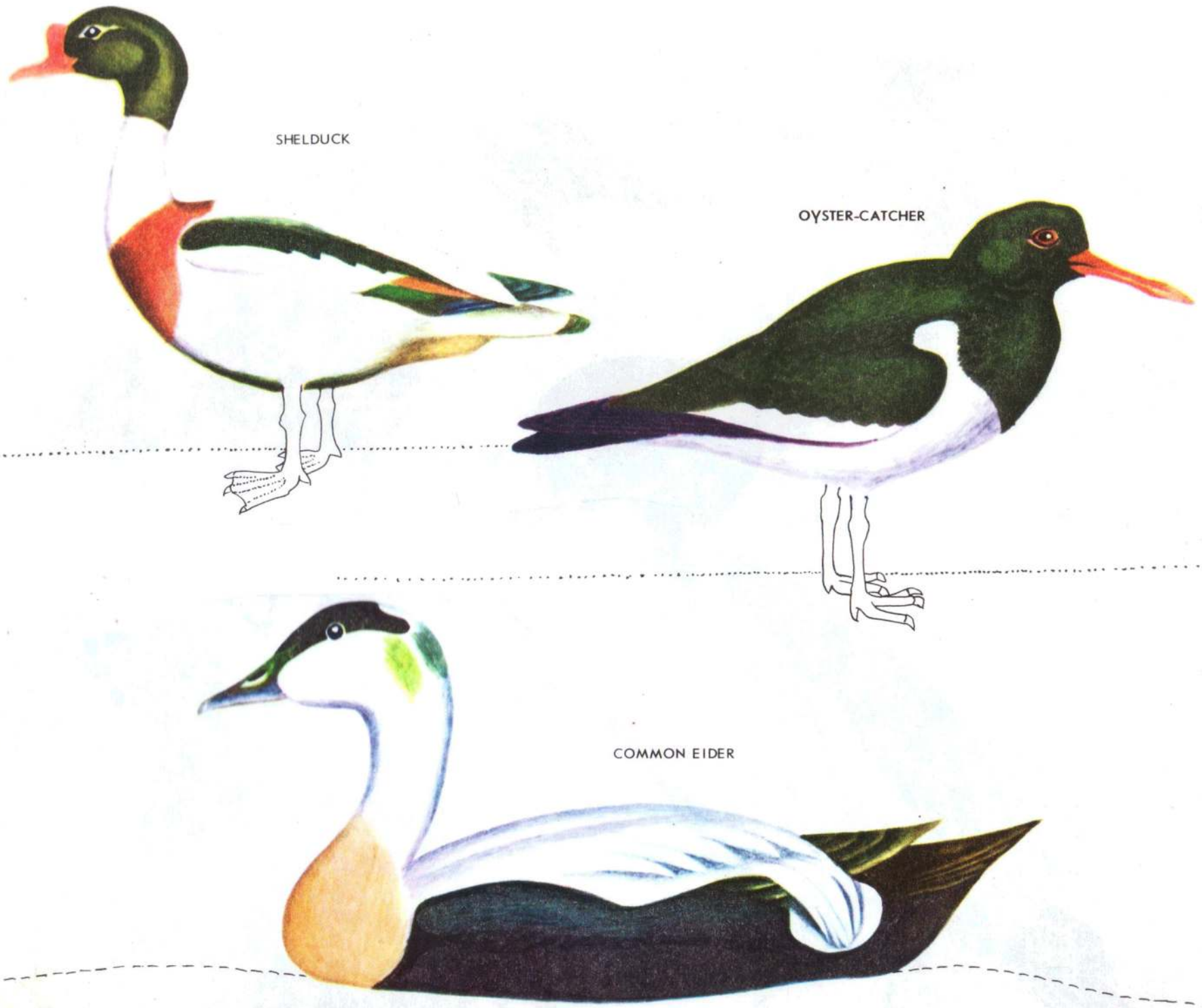
MALLARD

HARVEST MOUSE

GOOSANDER

EUROPEAN BITTERN

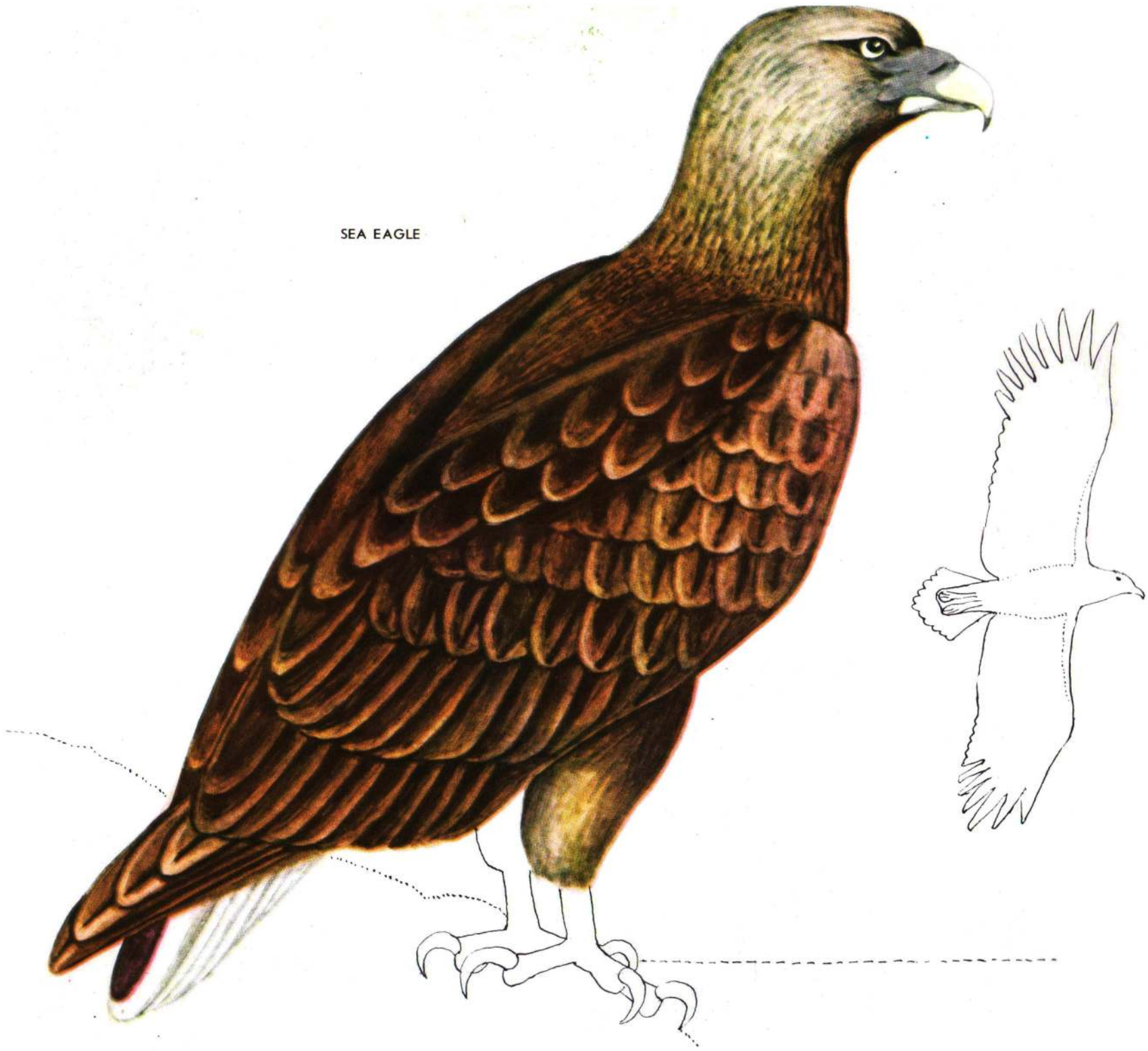
GREAT CRESTED GREBE




On the more distant coasts and islands, where the shore is more open and where there's little reed growing, we can always find the goosander, but not the bittern. Instead there are other birds. One of them with its black-and-white feathers looks like the magpie. And that's what the coastal people call the oyster-catcher: the sea-magpie. Other birds belonging to the family ot sea-birds are the shelduck, a beautiful multi-coloured bird, and several kinds of gulls, some of them bigger and some smaller. The common gull and the black-headed gull can be seen also on rivers and lakes, but the big dark-coated, black-backed gull remains true to the sea. (You'll find the black-headed gull, the common gull and the black-backed gull on the back cover of this book.) The eider, too, is a sea-bird. It spends the greater part of its life on the waves and comes to dry land only to breed. The eider is so used to life on the sea that not even the most violent storms frighten it. The bird drawn here is the male. The female eider has brownish feathers not unlike those of the grouse-hen who lives in the forest.

While it's hatching its eggs, the eider-hen plucks fluffy down from its breast to line the nest warmly. People still gather the down from the nests of eiders after the young have left the nest. Eiderdown is used for making warm sleeping-bags and clothes for explorers of polar regions, pilots and mountain climbers.

The sea feeds many birds but the only animal in Estonia to gain access to the riches of the sea is the seal. The seal is a true sea-animal, it's more of a water animal than the otter or the beaver. There are many sea-animals to be found in the seas of the world, the seal is the only one in our sea. The seal doesn't need firm land even to give birth to its young, its cubs are born on the ice. However, one can sometimes see the seals taking a rest on stones or reefs. The seal is curious by nature: sometimes it follows a boat at sea




and even approaches it to have a closer look at it, its wet moustache sagging. On dry land the seal's movements are clumsy and it doesn't feel at home there.

There's still someone sitting on the high bank and looking fixedly at the sea. It's been sitting there, looking deep in thought, for several hours already. On our trip through the country and across the sea we haven't met this bird yet. And no wonder: the sea eagle can seldom be seen by the traveller. There are only a few couples of sea eagles dwelling in our seaside forests.

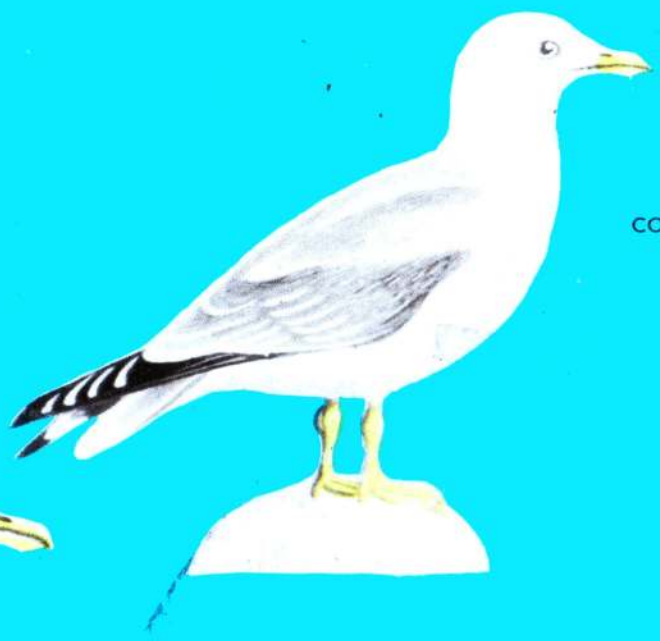
The sea eagle is one of the biggest and mightiest among our birds. It fears no one but man, as it is stronger than any other bird with the exception of the swan. We can justly consider the sea eagle the ruler of the bird kingdom. There are other eagles dwelling in Estonia, too, but all of them are smaller than the sea eagle. As the number of sea eagles was diminishing in our country as well as in the whole world, in some places they have become extinct already, they have been taken under protection. In some countries much trouble is taken in order to save the sea eagle, who is in danger of perishing, and to preserve it for the nature of the country. The sea eagle has become a sort of symbol of nature protection.

We have come to the end of our make-believe trip in Estonia and have met quite a number of small and big creatures of the animal kingdom.

Maybe tomorrow you'll really pack your bag and go off to the animal kingdom. If you do, be quiet and careful about it, because only then you'll find friends in the forest, in the marshes and on the seacoast. And remember: where a noisy man appears the birds and beasts soon disappear.

FRED JÜSSI

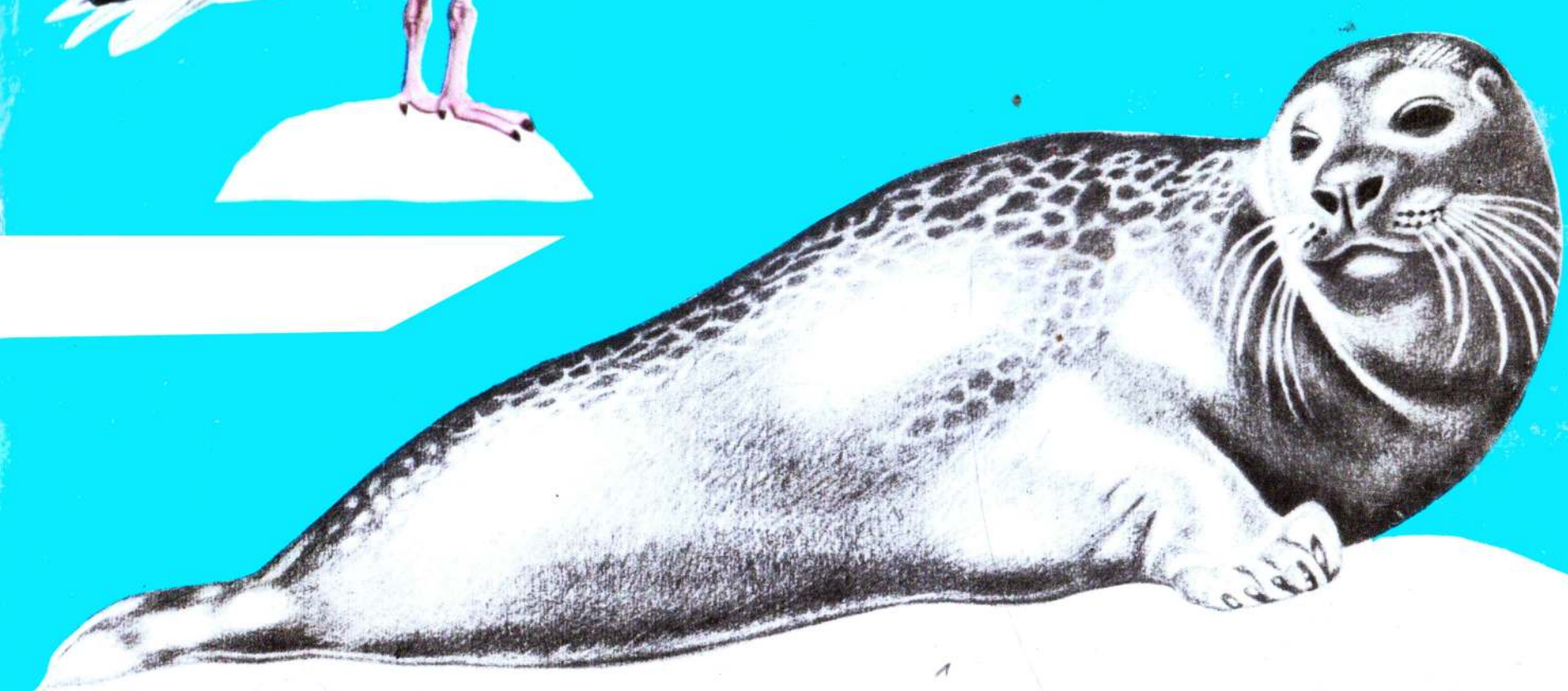
BLACK-HEADED GULL



COMMON GULL

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

RINGED SEAL



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**Translated by Kaja Toomel**